Placing the Heels Next to the Heels of the Adjacent Musalli

Question: I require clarification on the following issues and hope that you will furnish replies.

Hadith 195 in *Riyaadhus Saaliheen* (Chapter on the virtues of the first row) mentions that the Sahabah ψ stood in their rows with their shoulders as well as their feet touching those of the person next to them. This is what the Ahle Hadith (Ghayr Muqallideen) maintain.

Here in America and Canada there are many of these Ahle Hadith attending Hanafi Masaajid and they always quote the above narration of Bukhaari. We wish to humbly request you to furnish a detailed reply to this Hadith according to the Hanafi Madh'hab. Should we stand with our feet touching as they say or with our shoulders touching as we Hanafis do?

Answer: The Ahadeeth emphasise the importance of straightening the rows in salaah.

1. Hadhrat Anas τ reports that Rasulullaah ρ said, "Straighten your rows, stand close together and shoulder-to-shoulder because I swear by the Being Who controls my life that I can see Shaytaan creep between the gaps just as a kid would."[1]

2. Hadhrat Anas τ also reports that Rasulullaah ρ said, "Straighten your rows because straightening of the rows forms part of the establishment of salaah."[2]

3. Hadhrat Nu'maan bin Basheer τ says that Rasulullaah ρ would personally straighten the rows. It once occurred that he was about to call out the Takbeer Tahreema when he noticed someone's chest sticking out from the row. Rasulullaah ρ then remarked, "You will have to straighten your rows, otherwise Allaah will certainly allow discord to prevail between you."[3]

4. Hadhrat Anas τ reports that the Iqaamah has already been called out when Rasulullaah ρ faced us and said, "Straighten your rows and stand close together **because I can see you behind me."**[4]

5. Hadhrat Abdullaah bin Umar τ narrates that Rasulullaah ρ said, "Straighten your rows, keep your shoulders aligned, fill all gaps and be compassionate towards your brothers. Never leave gaps for Shaytaan to fill. Allaah will join with one who joins a row (by filling a gap) and Allaah will sever ties with one who severs a row (by failing to fill a gap)."[5]

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[1] Abu Dawood, as quoted in *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.98).
[2] Bukhaari and Muslim, as quoted in *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.98).
[3] Muslim, as quoted in *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.98).
[4] Bukhaari, as quoted in *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.98).
[5] Abu Dawood, as quoted in *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.99).

6. Hadhrat Abu Hurayrah τ reports that Rasulullaah ρ said, "Place your Imaam in the centre and fill all gaps."[6]

Apart from the above Ahadeeth there are many more emphasising the importance of straightening the rows of salaah, filling gaps between Musalli, standing close by and in line. Rasulullaah ρ verbally addressed the situation and also did so practically. Following in these teachings, the Sahabah ψ also attached great importance to the practice.

As for the narration of Bukhaari quoted in *Riyaadhus Saaliheen*, the simple reply is that it should not be interpreted literally. It must also be borne in mind that **the words** are not those **of Rasulullaah ρ,** but those **of the narrator.** It will therefore be deceiving to use this Hadith to state that these are the words of Rasulullaah ρ and his instruction. The narrator of the Hadith merely wishes to emphasise the importance of standing close to each other, saying that they stood so close together that it was **almost as if their feet and shoulders touched.**

The famous commentators of Bukhaari Hafidh Ibn Hajar Asqalaani[7] رحمه الله and Allaama Badrud Deen Ayni[8] رحمه الله both state in their commentaries exactly what we have explained earlier and that the narration by no means refers to widening the legs to the extent that the feet touch those of the next person. Refer to *Ma'aarifus Sunan* (Vol.2 Pg.297-299) for more details.

The great Muhaddith Allaama Anwar Shah Kashmeeri رحمه الله states that neither Tirmidhi nor any of the other authentic compilations of Ahadeeth contain a chapter like the one in Bukhaari, stating that the shoulders and feet need to touch in salaah. It is only the Ghayr Muqallideen who interpret the narration literally and then look extremely pretentious when they stretch their legs apart in salaah to touch the feet of the person adjacent to them. Not only does this appear to look pretentious, but it also conflicts with the humility of salaah. **This was clearly not the practice of the Imaams of Fiqh and the pious predecessors.** The practice of the pious predecessors as was practised from generation to generation is sufficient enough proof to tell us that the narration refers to ensuring meticulousness when straightening the rows.

As for the distance to be maintained between the feet when standing, it needs to be remembered that the distance should be such that it allows one to stand comfortably, without difficulty and in a manner that appears humble. When Hadhrat Abdullaah bin Mas'ood τ saw a person standing in salaah with both feet together, he remarked that the person had forsaken

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[6] Abu Dawood, as quoted in *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.99).
[7] *Fat'hul Baari* (Vol.2 Pg.211).
[8] Umdatul Qaari (Vol.5 Pg.259).

the Sunnah. **Therefore, the Sunnah practice is to stand with the feet neither too close by and neither too far apart.**[9]

Commenting on the practice of the Ghayr Muqallideen who emphasise that the ankles should touch, Hadhrat Moulana Husayn Ahmad Madani رحمه الله also states that the purpose of the narration is merely to stress with emphasis the need to stand close by. The ankles and feet need to be so straight and close that they would appear to be together. There are several reasons to assume this meaning.

1. The first is that it is this meaning that the scholars have always taken.

2. Secondly, practising on the literal meaning is difficult, pretentious and affects the humility of salaah.

3. Thirdly, the purport is understood from the words of other Ahadeeth. Consequently, Rasulullaah ρ used various words to emphasise that there should be no gaps between the rows but never instructed that people should make their ankles touch each other.

4. Fourthly, the straightness and fusion of the rows does not depend solely on ankles touching because the row can effectively be fused together without the ankles touching.

5. Fifthly, even if the ankles touch, there will still be an element of separation in the area above the ankles. Now if this is ignored on account of the difficulty involved in eliminating this element, it becomes evident that joining the ankles also shares the failing of other methods in ensuring 100% fusion.

6. If it is necessary to assume the literal meanings of words, then one of the words Rasulullaah ρ used was "تراصّوا" ('stand close by'), which really refers to the way in which molten metal is fused together. How will this be possible in a row? If the ankles are attached, there will still be a gap below the hips and at other places.

7. Furthermore, ensuring that the ankles are together will create an appearance that conflicts with the humility of salaah and no Hadith encourages this. **In fact, it has been reported that Hadhrat Abdullaah bin Umar τ stood with his feet neither too far apart not too close by**[10]**.** Allaama Shaami رحمه الله and the author of *Si'aayah* both state that according to research scholars, there should be a gap of four fingers between the feet in salaah because this is closest to humility. **This is also the opinion of Shaafi'ee scholars.** Another opinion of theirs is that the distance be a hand span apart.

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[9] *Anwaarul Baari* (Vol.3 Pg.180).
[10] *Laami'ud Daraaree*.

8. Because people vary in height, it is not possible for their shoulders to touch. Standing 'shoulder-to-shoulder' can therefore not be interpreted literally and refers to an emphasis in standing close by. This indicates that the same meaning should be assumed when it comes to joining the ankles.

9. Since it is considered contrary to etiquette for a person performing salaah individually to stand with his legs far apart, the same will apply to the person performing salaah in Jamaa'ah.

10. **The successive practice of the Ummah weighs heavily in determining the purport of a narration.** This case is no exception. Whereas some of the Imaams of Fiqh saw the latter times of the Sahabah ψ, others saw the times of the Taabi'een and those after them. Their students and people after them all saw the practices of their forebears and followed suit. It was in this manner that the practice came before us today and this is still the practice of the greater portion of the Ummah. The purport of the Hadith therefore is to emphasise the importance of standing as close to each other as possible.[11]

And Allaah knows best what is most correct.

[11] *Ma'aarife Madaniyyah* (Vol.4 Pg.98).